

EARLIEST HISTORY OF CLATSOP PLAINS

The Clatsop Plains, described as being the land north of Tillamook Head and extending to the Columbia River, were narrow, long stretches of shifting sand dunes, combined with the marshy water backup of several lakes, including Smith, Neocoxie, and Sunset Lakes. One mile from the shoreline is the narrow corridor where one of the first land claims on the Oregon Coast was settled.

An appropriate description of the Columbia River bar is described by the botanist David Douglas in 1825 while on the ship Williamson: He claimed the bar was "1,000 times worse than going around Cape Horn." Four years later that same ship was broken up on ~~the~~ Clatsop Spit, the south side of the river, and everyone was drowned.

In 1841 the Wilkes Expedition had a vessel named Peacock that went aground on the North Spit of the river and no one survived that wreck. The spit was then named Peacock after the sunken sloop. The Columbia River bar was by then given the reputation "graveyard of the Pacific" by the men of the California Gold Rush when pilots of tugboats described its capricious navigation.

The Plains were first settled in about 1840 by Christian missionaries traveling from the Willamette and Columbia Rivers to create trails and settlements. Quoting from Charles Stevens is an 1854 description of Clatsop Plains:

"The country is perhaps the most curious that you ever saw. Just take your map and find Point Adams, at the mouth of this river and run down the coast 20 or thirty miles and you will pass along the western lines of all their claims, here is a high sand ridge and handsome beach where you can drive a horse and buggy, or a dozen of them together the whole length. About half a mile back of the ridge is another and about one fourth that distance from this is a third ridge which runs the whole length of the Plains, just as straight as the lines on this paper. These ridges are narrow on the top, hardly wide enough for two wagons to pass, and from ten to 30 feet high. Inside this third ridge are the most of their (Pioneer) farms."

The shoreline does not look anything like it did in those days because of what is called a prograding coast; that is it is always building and advancing with large amounts of sand.

² There was no Clatsop Spit as we know it. The Clatsop Spit of today was partly
³ developed because of the construction in the 20's of the South Jetty on the Columbia River.

Getting to the Clatsop Plains was by way of the Columbia River from the north and a trail from the south coast. A lot of the land was marshy and difficult to travel and often swamped in the winter. The ridges that had accumulated were old fore dunes that made up the trail or road.

Shallow wells were available and the forest provided plenty of trees for wood. In part,
⁴ because of light vegetation or low shrubs, the Donation Land Claims (DLC) was quickly

Several other noteworthy pioneers who purchased land claims were James Taylor, the director of the Oregon Exchange Co., who adopted the emblem of the beaver on the money; Lewis Hubbell Judson, a Justice of the Peace in Salem, whose home, "Chemeketa" was donated to the Oregon Institute for Education, ~~where he was President of the Salem Historical Society in its early history~~; and John Thomas, known as the "Bard of Clatsop", a published poet who lived alone in the woods. Thomas was originally from England and owned a small parcel on the plains. ?

5 In the book "Indian Tribes of Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, the name of Clatsop is described as a word meaning dried salmon. The tribe location centered near Cape Adams (near Hammond-Warrenton), as far as Tongue Point and south to Tillamook Head. The villages were: Neahkeluk (Tongue Point); Niake-wankik (s. Point Adams at the mouth of Ohaunia Creek; and Neahkstout (near Hammond). During the time of Lewis & Clark, the population was 300. By 1855, all the Indians of the North Oregon Coast agreed to turn over their lands to the U. S. Government. They were given land and forced to move within one year to a reservation at Grand Ronde. They also received \$120,000 over a period of time. 6 7

8 According to Surf Pines resident Paul See, remnants of an Indian campsite were found on top of Strawberry Hill. Near the Bloxom (now Maltman) house on top of Strawberry Hill, the high point of Surf Pines, shards of arrowheads were found. Another arrowhead was found embedded through the chest of an entire skeleton with a large growth on the skull. It was discovered by Paul See and his Mother in the 30's near what is now the community park between Seabreeze Lane and Ocean Drive. 9

2 { In the region of what is now Surf Pines, the early settlers primarily had cattle and horses grazing on the always changing dunes, which, year after year became increasingly difficult to maintain. The natural vegetation of tall grasses would be eliminated after a severe storm along with trampling by animals foraging for food, which caused the active dunes to be further eroded. Mrs. John Waterhouse, widow of the first postmaster of Gearhart, remembered the area between Gearhart and Camp Clatsop (now Rilea) was sometimes called Indian or Devil's Race Track. Whether or not Indians raced their ponies in the hollow between the ocean and the present highway may be a myth, but old timers also spoke about foxhunts around that location as remembered events. by

A little known fact relating to the region that became Surf Pines was obscured by the publicized fact of the wreck of the Peter Iredale while trying to enter the Columbia River in 1906. Eighteen days later, another British sailing ship, the Galena, a 292 foot bark from England, sailed up the coast from Chile. The ship ran into heavy fog and rain and drifted toward shore. It ran aground in front of what is now the beach trail from Ocean Drive and Horizon Lane. Some remains are still imbedded deep into the sand near the spruce tree on the north side of the trail and other parts are now at the Columbia River Maritime Museum. In recent years a ship's bell was also donated. Fortunately, no one was lost in this mishap.

To whom?
Pastor
or
seaside?

Shallow wells were available and the forest provided plenty of trees for wood. In part, because of light vegetation or low shrubs, Donation Land Claims (DLC) were quickly acquired and settled. Animal grazing became the primary source of income for the early pioneers. What wheat was grown had to be taken by canoe to Oregon City, 140 miles away, where it was ground for flour. About 20 land donation claims were staked by 1843, when the Oregon provisional government was established, but the settlers soon found there were not enough nutrients in the soil, and some moved southward to the Tillamook area or along the Lewis and Clark River to the east.

One of the earliest settlers to remain was William Hobson. He sent to Scotland for seeds from the Scotch broom plant with the intent to beautify his property. Reminding him of his native country he had his brother, Richard come back from their homeland with more seeds to cover much of the county. In 1888 the seeds from those plants were harvested and sent to Fort Stevens to hold the sand. In the 30's its blooms extended from Astoria to Seaside where some of it was cut to make way for the widened highway.

The first DLC claim was to Jonathan and Harriett Jewett whose stake was 320 acres, purchased with \$5.00 gold pieces that she kept hidden in her belt during the period she was held captive at the time of the Whitman Massacre. They held their land until 1869 when it was sold to their sons, who then deeded it to Josiah West in 1872.

The Josiah West farm was one of 146 in the region by 1880, when the population increased to 7,200. Milk production had increased to the point that butter was sent to San Francisco in a small ship that the farmers and merchants had built. West's cheese factory on Clatsop Plains was the largest of three and he shipped his cheese to Portland and Astoria or to the larger hotels in Clatsop County at the time. It was sold for \$.06 pound. He also sold wild mushrooms that were growing on his land. These 2,000 acres of land, originally sold for \$1.00 an acre, were divided into nine parcels, one being given to Rose West Johnson, aunt of Paul See. A primary portion of this land would later become part of Surf Pines.

Nearby, the first Presbyterian Church west of the Mississippi was established in 1846 by three families, one being the Alva Condit family, whose son became a minister there in 1877. Next to the church is the Clatsop Plains Pioneer Cemetery where most of the pioneers from the Clatsop Plains are buried. Among familiar names are Solomon Smith, the first schoolteacher in Oregon and his Indian princess wife, Celiast, daughter of Clatsop Chief Coboway. Included are families from the 1843 emigration who helped establish the Oregon Trail: John and William Hobson, Thomas Owens and George Summers. Other prominent names include John Jewett, Lewis Judson, and James Taylor.

Another early landowner, Cyrus Olney, was a trustee of Willamette University in Salem and a member of the Oregon bar in 1851. While serving as associate justice of the Supreme Court he assisted in the formation of statehood in 1859. In 1866 Olney was elected to the Oregon legislature. After he purchased 320 acres on the Plains, he moved to the coast where he eventually became the territorial judge. He died in Astoria in 1870 and is buried in Pioneer Cemetery.

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STABILIZATION OF THE DUNES

10 By the early 1900's Oregon had the largest unstable dunes on the west coast. In order to
11 allow vacationing families and tourists visiting Seaside and Gearhart, one of the earliest stabilization projects was done by the O. N. & R. railroad between 1897 and 1899 at the northern end of Seaside, and it was a success.

12 The sand problem was further altered by the building of the south jetty at the mouth of the Columbia River, which began in 1885, and later the north jetty construction on the Washington side. These were necessary for the navigation of the river as a major transportation system, but it caused the sand to fill in behind the jetty on the south side. } 8
By the 1930's about 3,000 acres of exposed dunes had developed. To this day, sand accumulating near the mouth of the river creates a continuous danger to crossing the bar.

In 1935 Clatsop County asked for assistance from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). A camp was established at Warrenton in 1935 to stabilize the dunes with picket fences, donated by Clatsop County and using local young people. The CCC camp would become the first and largest of its kind on the west coast. (The dunes included were those that covered Surf Pines.) When it went out of existence in 1941 as young workers went to war, The Warrenton Dune Soil Conservation Project took over to finish the project.
13 (As you drive through Surf Pines today you can still see some of the original coast pines that were planted in rows three feet apart.) More permanent trees such as Sitka spruce and western hemlock were also introduced. At the same time the Astoria Nursery Unit of the CCC was asked to furnish European beach and dune grass, various legumes, and Scotch broom to help with the stabilization. The only native plant material used was the American dune grass, found in the fore-dune areas, as it needs a constant sand supply.
14 The largest natural stands are found on the Surf Pines shoreline and north to Sunset Beach. It has wider leaves and a lime green color with a common name, sea lyme-grass. (See photo)

While still in high school in Warrenton, Wilbur Ternyik remembered helping with the CCC project with his schoolmates. They were able to plant 2,000 trees a day and
15 received \$15.00. (Ternyik was later hired by Barney Lucas to plant trees in Surf Pines). They expected only 50% growth and were amazed that they had 100% success.

16 Many young people were brought in from the Southern states to work on the project. They brought pet opossums with them. Before that time no one had ever seen these animals in Oregon but they eventually spread throughout the state.

Because of the success of this unique project, Ternyik became a nationally known conservationist. He became a consultant around the world in controlling dunes with plant material.